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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Insurgency in Thailand*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
28 March 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Insurgency in Thailand

A General Overview

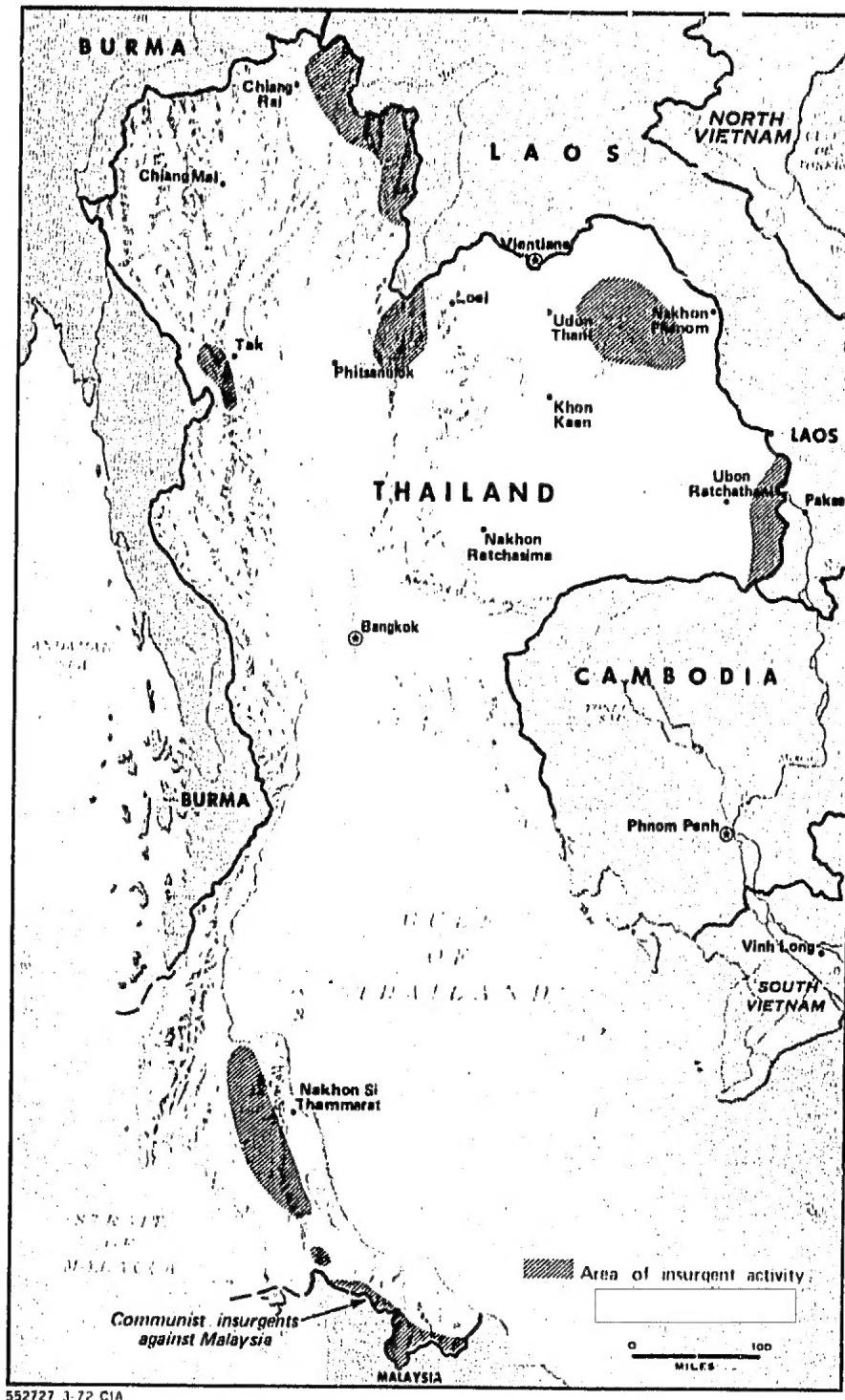
It is almost 20 years since the Thai Communist Party, over the objections of some of its leaders, chose a policy of revolutionary warfare as a means of gaining power in Thailand. Over seven years have passed since motley bands of insurgents in the north-east fired the first shots of what some called the struggle for the next domino in Southeast Asia. The Thai insurgency is no longer in its infancy; it has grown, it has a measure of momentum, and, more important, it now has a history from which a few tentative observations and judgments can be drawn.

The growth of the insurgency over the past few years indicates that it is no longer credible to dismiss out of hand the possibility that over time it could threaten the viability of the Thai Government. Thailand's nationalism, its Buddhism, its fundamental economic well-being, and the relative homogeneity of its people, are strong and may be ultimately the decisive factors in the struggle against the Communists. But these traits will not immunize the Thais from the dislocations and difficulties of coping with a rural revolutionary movement. On the other hand, a hard-headed look at the insurgency indicates that the almost magical powers that are sometimes attributed to "wars of national liberation" have been greatly exaggerated in this case. The Communists are making gains, but they

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suffer from serious weaknesses. It is still far from certain, for example, that the insurgency can reverse the trend of the past few years toward greater reliance on tribal people in remote areas of the north. Until the Communists make more significant inroads among the ethnic Thai--who are the great majority of Thailand's people--it is still possible that the insurgency will evolve into something approximating the situation in Burma, where the government has struggled indecisively for twenty-five years against border disidents and insurgents.

But the insurgents do have important assets in the contest. For one thing, there has been no sign of any fundamental reduction in China's support for the Thai Communist movement. There is also no evidence that North Vietnamese or Pathet Lao assistance to Thai Communist units in Laos has been affected by Hanoi's political problem with Peking. The Chinese have turned aside conciliatory overtures from the government in Bangkok and have given no sign that they intend to curtail support for the Thai insurgency in order to pave the way for a political accommodation with Thailand. They are proceeding apace with a road-building effort in Laos. One purpose of this effort is clearly to give them the option of increasing their capability to support a Thai insurgency (or at least to convince Bangkok that that is their intention) and thus make Bangkok more amenable.

At this juncture the capabilities of the government and of the insurgents are growing, but the latter still appear to be making the relative gains. As imprecise and as unsophisticated as they are, all the statistical indicators in Thailand point to higher levels of Communist-initiated attacks, ambushes, assassinations, and propaganda meetings than two years ago. There are now estimated to be between 4,400 and 5,050 full-time armed Thai Communists

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throughout the country, about 1,500 more than in 1969. In addition, the insurgents' military capabilities have grown as a consequence of better training, more experience, and, most important, the acquisition of better weapons.

Most of the insurgents' comparative gains have come in north Thailand, the most sorely beset of the three regions in which the Communists are active. Of the 1,500 guerrillas who have been added to the total in the past two years, 1,000 are in the north. In addition, almost all of the insurgents' new weaponry has gone to their forces in the north. The 2,300-2,700 armed insurgents operating there have almost completed a switch-over to Communist-manufactured small arms, mostly AK 47s and SKS submachine guns. The insurgents in the north have also, for the first time in the insurgency, used mortars and grenade launchers. They have received large numbers of non-metallic anti-personnel mines. The mines, which are of Soviet design, have been particularly effective in helping defend the insurgent bases against government operations.

**Recent Growth in Thai Armed Insurgent Strength**

| <u>Area</u>  | <u>1969</u>    | <u>1970</u>    | <u>1971</u>    |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| North  | 1,300-1,600    | 1,900          | 2,300-2,680    |
| Northeast  | 1,200-1,500    | 1,400-1,600    | 1,525-1,775    |
| West Central   | 75             | 125            | 125            |
| Mid-South  | <u>300-400</u> | <u>300-400</u> | <u>460-470</u> |
| Totals   | 2,875-3,575    | 3,725-4,025    | 4,410-5,050    |
| Far South ( <i>Communist Terrorist Organization, targeted against Malaysia</i> ) | 1,200-1,400    | 1,400-1,600    | 1,800-1,900    |

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The north, for a number of reasons, will probably continue to be the most difficult area for the government. First, the rugged mountainous terrain is ideal for guerrilla warfare and not at all suited to a Thai Army that has been trained to conduct conventional warfare in open country. Second, the Communist bases there are contiguous to a porous and insecure Laotian border, reached by lines of communication from China and North Vietnam. Third, the Communists have managed to co-opt belligerent tribal people (many of whom are distantly related to the Meo fighting for Vang Pao in Laos) who know the terrain and harbor long-standing grudges against the Thai Government.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the northern insurgents have been able to establish control over the series of mountain ridges along the Lao-Thai border. Over the past year or so, the northern insurgents have been attempting to politicize and organize the tribal villages in the mountains, while attempting to initiate contacts among the ethnic Thai villagers who live in the nearby valleys. The limited inroads they have made among the Thai villages appear thus far to be based more on the natural accommodation villagers make to a military force than on any real conversion. Although the insurgents have been more actively engaged against government security forces, some of this activity has been essentially defensive in nature. For example, in some areas of Nan Province, attacks have been aimed against government efforts to build roads into insurgent-controlled areas. The insurgents have also attempted to expand westward out of the border area, but so far they appear to have had only modest success. It seems likely that more significant expansion efforts will be made in the coming months.

| Countrywide<br>Insurgency Incidents |              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1965                                | 45           |
| 1966                                | 585          |
| 1967                                | 921          |
| 1968                                | 1,034        |
| 1969                                | 1,981        |
| 1970                                | 2,556        |
| 1971                                | 3,500 (est.) |

-4-

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While the Communists were making military gains in the north, they continued to emphasize political action in the northeast, the main area of the insurgency until 1967. At that time the attempt of the northeast insurgents at mass expansion collapsed in the face of the government's counter-action. Thereafter they began slowly and painstakingly to build a village-based organization that could, in classical fashion, support a jungle guerrilla force. By all accounts, the insurgents have had considerable success spreading their influence and establishing a political organization in the villages in and near the Phu Phan hills. At the same time they have thwarted the half-hearted government effort to establish a village defense system in the threatened areas. The Communists appear to be doing a much better job than they did in the period before 1967.

[redacted] their jungle troops--whose numbers are still not much greater than they were in 1967--are receiving replacements for their locally acquired weapons. But it seems unlikely that the Communists have yet developed a secure supply corridor that would permit them to rely entirely on outside supplies.

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Although the Communists have turned in an impressive performance pulling themselves together in the northeast since 1967 and have made significant new inroads, the government has not yet renewed its counterinsurgency effort there. There may be parallels between the present situation in the northeast and the 1964-66 period, when the absence of government military operations permitted Communist gains that proved to be ephemeral once the government reacted. For example, last September, the government sent a small reconnaissance patrol into one of the Communists' areas of influence; after two insurgents surrendered to the patrol, almost 600 "village supporters" left the area and rallied to the government. The incident may be only an isolated case, but it does raise questions about the Communists' new and revived village apparatus in the northeast. It may be more impressive on paper than in reality.

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If it is true that the Communists continue to gain strength in Thailand, then it must follow that the government has not met the ultimate test of containing, if not eradicating, the insurgency. It is clear that despite the lip-service paid to the canons of counterinsurgency, the endless bureaucratic re-organizations, and the modest but loudly trumpeted increases in security expenditures, the Thai Government's security effort is failing. Still, for all of their deficiencies, the Thai are better organized and prepared both materially and psychologically to fight an insurgency than they were ten or even five years ago.

It is, however, sometimes difficult to determine exactly how Bangkok's increased capability has been translated into more effective action in the field. The performance of the Thai Army in the tri-border area of Phitsanulok, Phetchabun, and Loei provinces this year and in Operation Phalad in Chiang Rai last year, was a far from impressive example of how a large, conventional force fixes and inflicts injury on small guerrilla bands, even when the insurgents chose, as they did in the tri-province area, to stand their ground and fight. The Thai Army is not getting as much out of big-unit "sweeps" against guerrillas in mountainous terrain as it might. The army's planning is still poor, tactical intelligence is either inadequate or badly used, tactics are frequently deficient and, most important of all, leadership is neither aggressive nor imaginative. And yet, when these operations are compared with those undertaken by the army and police in the 1967-1970 period in the north, a discernible pattern of improvement emerges. The Thai Army is slowly coming to the realization that the tribal guerrillas cannot be scared off with air strikes and noisy artillery barrages and that troops from the Thai plains are at a distinct disadvantage operating in the mountains. Three years ago, the insurgents turned back a government effort to re-establish its presence in the Hin Long Kla area. But in the past two weeks, the army has retaken Hin Long Kla and forced the insurgents to abandon at least temporarily the base for sanctuary in Laos or farther north along the border.

-6-

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It is highly unlikely that this operation will result in a decisive improvement of the security situation in the tri-province area. For one thing, it remains to be seen whether the army will attempt to keep a residual force in the area after the present operation terminates. But it is a mistake to evaluate Thai operations solely on the basis of their decisiveness or even whether they accomplish as much as they might. It is important to recognize that for all of their deficiencies, the Thai operations in the north are targeted against the hardcore Communist bases. These operations must have an inhibiting effect on the insurgents' plans for expansion, for they mean that the Communists do not enjoy secure sanctuaries and must devote some of their energies to defending their bases. The operations are important contributions to keeping the initiative from passing entirely to the Communists.

The operations are also significant as an earnest of the government's determination to contain the insurgency. Even if we discount some of the expressions of concern as designed principally for American ears, the fact remains that there has been a clear change in the attitude of the top leaders in Bangkok toward the insurgency. They are now convinced--as they were not a few years ago--that they have a real problem on their hands. They are still a long way from being determined to make the necessary sacrifices to crush the insurgency or to deal it a grievous blow. The Thai have made it clear that they will not operate on such a basis; their instincts are reactive not pre-emptive; their strategic philosophy is to let the punishment fit the crime. This has been best illustrated in the northeast. When the insurgents there began to get out of hand in the 1964-67 period, the army was sent in to bring them under control. When the situation improved, most army units withdrew. Now that the insurgents are regaining the initiative, the government is ready to react once again and is again planning increased operations.

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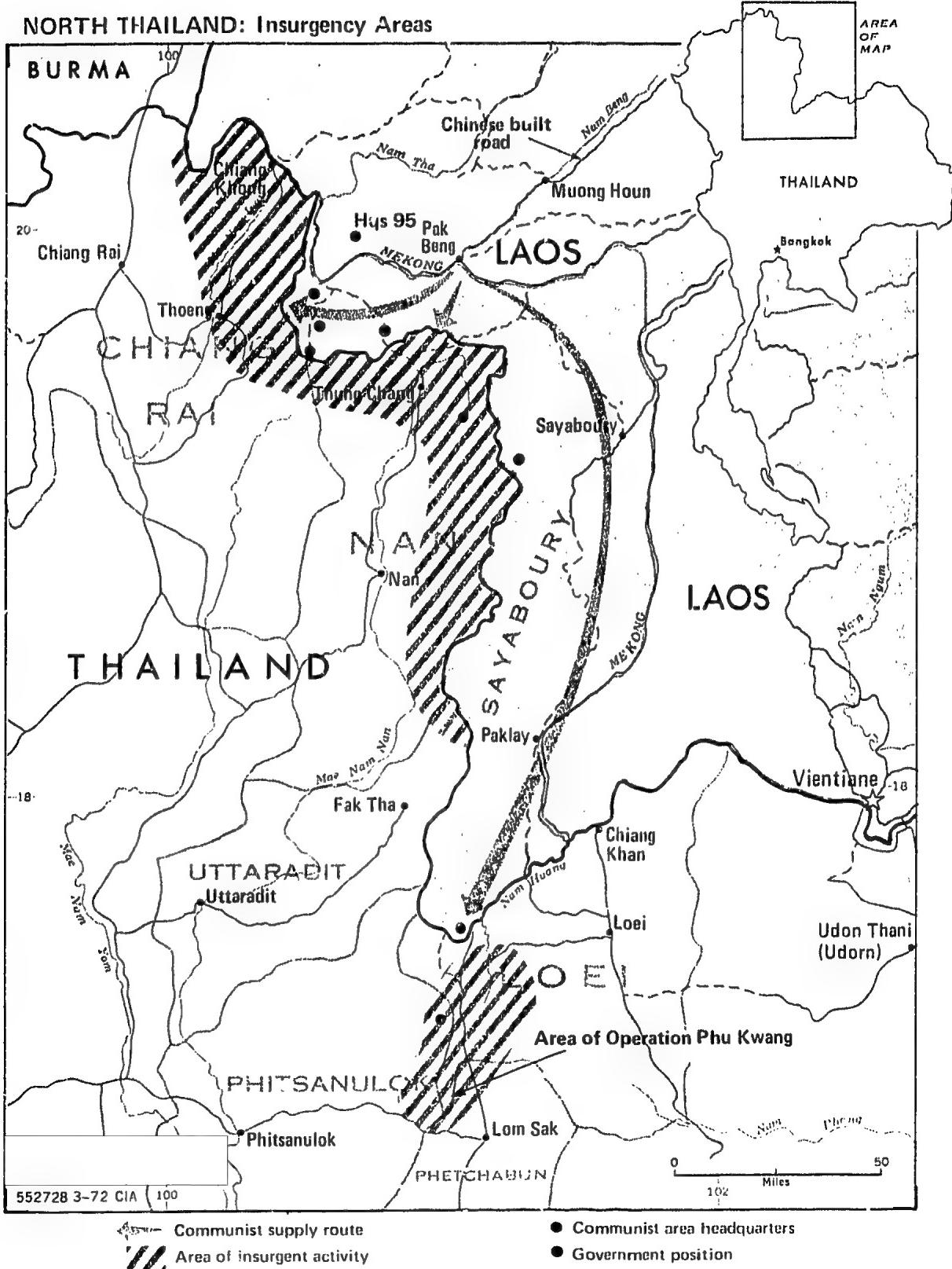
This reactive process is disturbing because it is vulnerable to miscalculation. The day may come when the government will be unable to meet the threat. That day is clearly not yet here. But the key question is whether the Thai performance is so bereft of potential achievement and the insurgent prospects so foreboding that one must conclude the present downward trend is irreversible unless fundamental changes are made. So far this has not happened, but the danger signals are becoming more distinct. In the next few years the government's will and capability to meet a growing insurgent movement may be sternly tested.

-8-

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## NORTH THAILAND: Insurgency Areas



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Insurgency in The North

1. Armed insurgency began in northern Thailand five years ago, and that region is now the most seriously threatened in the country. It is the only region in the country where the insurgents have kept the initiative and where they have chalked up a steady record of victories over government forces.

2. Insurgency cropped up in the north at about the time the government began to make some headway against the longer established insurgency in the northeast. Although the Thai Communists are not credited with any capacity for sophisticated strategic planning, the opening of operations in the north may well have been intended to compensate for setbacks in the northeast. The difficult terrain--heavy forest and rugged mountain--provides ideal conditions for guerrilla operations, and the lack of an adequate road system offers the insurgents an added measure of security.

3. The ethnic character of the insurgency in the north also distinguishes it from other areas. Although an integral part of the countrywide Thai Communist movement, the insurgency in the north is based on people not ethnically Thai, the Meo hill tribesmen. Traditionally neglected and treated with disdain by the Thai, the Meo were flattered by, and quickly responded to, Communist blandishments. Contacts with the hill tribesmen date from the early 1960s; young recruits were sent to training schools in Laos and in some cases North Vietnam. Encountering little opposition from the government, the Communists began to extend their influence from the Laos border into the adjacent ridges in Thailand. By 1966, they were organizing on the Thai side of the border.

4. The insurgency is directed by the Communist Party of Thailand's Northern Regional Committee. Its command post called Headquarters 95, is located in northwestern Sayaboury Province in Laos. Hidden under a dense jungle canopy, the headquarters is protected by one Pathet Lao battalion.

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5. The insurgents are active in three distinct areas of the north--along the eastern border of Chiang Rai and Nan provinces; the "tri-province" area straddling Phitsanulok, Phetchabun, and Loei provinces; and in Tak Province along the Burma border. Insurgent strength in the north has been increasing more rapidly than in any other insurgent area in the country--400 new soldiers were added last year, 1,000 since 1969. There are now 2,300 full-time insurgents in this region. They are supplemented by some 800 village militia.

6. The party has eight separate area commands in the north. Supporting these commands are seven or eight Thai People's Liberation Army Front "battalions," with three companies per battalion. Three or four of these battalions are in Chiang Rai, three in Nan, and one in the tri-province area. Although structured as standard battalions (200 to 300 men per battalion), the troops generally operate in squad (12 men), platoon (36), or company (100) elements.

Arms and Supply

7. The Communist terrorists are becoming more aggressive as their supply of arms improves. The old American and French carbines that formerly were the insurgents' stand-bys are being turned over to the village militia. Most of the main force soldiers are now armed with weapons of Communist manufacture,

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including AK-47s, SKS semi-automatic carbines, and the Chinese Type 53 carbine. The changeover to Communist-made weapons began in 1970 and will probably be completed by the end of this year.

8. It is estimated that 1,800 Chinese and Soviet-produced small arms--AK-47 assault rifles and SKS Type 53 carbines--are in the hands of the terrorists. In addition, the insurgents have RPG-2 grenade launchers, a highly effective weapon that has been used to destroy armored personnel carriers and government defensive positions.

9. Another recent acquisition of the rebels is the Soviet-designed non-metallic anti-personnel mine. These mines are difficult to detect and have been very effective in curtailing the ability of government troops to move overland into Communist base areas. The large percentage of the government's casualties attributable to this mine has had a demoralizing effect on government troops. The Communists appear to have a limited supply of light mortars and may have some light machine guns as well. The first confirmed use of mortars was an attack on an army operational base in Nan last December.

10. The insurgents rely on local village support organizations for food and other supplies, but the presence of these weapons implies an efficient support system linking the insurgents with logistic corridors in Laos. Each area command and battalion headquarters maintains a supply cache for material, which is brought through the Nam Beng Valley to the Thai-Lao border by pack animal and porter and from there dispersed to area command depots located along the border. Two primary supply routes are used to service the northern insurgents from the Nan Beng Valley. One branch supplies the terrorists in Nan and Chiang Rai over a web of trails through northwestern Sayaboury Province in Laos. The other moves through southern Sayaboury along the Mekong and then swings west to a base area astride the Uttaradit-Sayaboury border called Phu Mieng where insurgents from the tri-province areas pick up their supplies.

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11. [redacted] the ter-  
 rorists brought in only eight tons of material during  
 1968, but this amount has almost certainly grown as  
 the number of insurgents has increased and as they  
 have become more active. It is not known whether  
 the weapons entering north Thailand are drawn from  
 North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao stockpiles already  
 in northwestern Laos or are shipped directly from  
 China to the Thai border. As the northern insurgents  
 expand their ranks, their needs for external support  
 increases proportionately. For the present, it is  
 believed that if their annual needs are no more than  
 100 tons, they could be met by the use of pack animal  
 horse caravans. Completion of a Chinese-built road  
 in the direction of Thailand in northwest Laos, now  
 only seven miles short of the expected terminus at  
 Pak Beng on the Mekong, will enhance the Communists'  
 ability to supply the insurgents in northern Thailand  
 and enable them to respond more quickly to unforeseen  
 needs.

12. Over the past year the Communists in north Thailand have begun to place more emphasis on gaining support from ethnic Thai villagers living in the valleys near insurgent strongholds. To this end, the Communists have broadened their propaganda themes, formerly aimed at the hill tribes, to include topics they hope will appeal to lowland Thai. Propaganda teams have entered remote Thai villages from time to time to give medical treatments, help with farm work, and spread anti-government propaganda. The mailed fist is there, too. Communist teams frequently try to intimidate the Thai villagers, and village headmen have been executed. The Communists evidently are still experimenting with various approaches to the Thai villagers. For example, although insurgents throughout Thailand generally are silent on the widely revered King, in at least one village meeting in Chiang Rai the insurgents raised the possibility of replacing the King with a Communist-backed "third prince." This anti-royalist theme has not cropped up again and suggests that the insurgents concluded that it scored no points with ethnic Thai audiences.

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13. Expansion into the Thai-populated areas reflects the insurgent need for supplies and a larger pool of potential recruits. Although the insurgents grow much of their own food, they also have purchasing agents in nearby villages. These agents pay cash for supplies not available in insurgent areas. The majority of lowland Thai who deal with the insurgents look on such sales as good business, not as a commitment to the Communist cause. As a result, trade between lowland Thai villages and the insurgents is flourishing in most areas adjacent to Communist base camps. The police, trying not to alienate the locals and probably in many instances in return for a cut of the profits, frequently do not interfere.

Nan and Chiang Rai Provinces

14. Nan Province contains the only area in the North declared "liberated" by the Communists. Always aggressive there, the Communists boosted their strength during 1971 to 700 by recruiting and arming another 100 full-time jungle soldiers. These troops are organized into three battalions under command of a Thai from southern Thailand. Communist armed propaganda teams have moved deeper into the province, using terror tactics, including assassination, to intimidate hill tribe villages. Forays down from the insurgent mountain bases keep the Thai Army tied to the defense of the Thai-populated valleys.

15. The district in Nan most seriously affected by the Communist buildup is Thung Chang, which includes the Communist "liberated area" along the Laos border. There, government authority and influence has been eroded by systematic Communist terrorism and propaganda. District officials rarely leave the district town for fear of being ambushed. The army dares move north of the district town only in convoys, and these have been attacked three times.

16. The aggressiveness of the Communists has in part been reactive. For example, some of the insurgent activity has been directed against government construction crews and security forces which

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are trying to extend a road north from Thung Chang into the heart of the "liberated area." Last November the Communists briefly occupied a lowland Thai village on the new road and destroyed road building equipment. This was the first significant attempt to intimidate lowland Thai villagers in this area.

17. The government is trying harder to stabilize the situation in Nan. Last fall 2,400 fresh army troops were rotated into Nan from the Bangkok area. This has made possible increased patrolling into the foothills, although the army has yet to penetrate the mountain redoubts of the guerrillas. Few of the new troops have received training in combating guerrillas, and their unfamiliarity with the terrain and the hill tribe people reduces the likelihood of significant government gains during the current dry season.

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19. Chiang Rai, Thailand's northernmost province, has more insurgents than any other province in the north--1,000 jungle soldiers. They are concentrated in the districts bordering Laos and control less Thai territory than do the guerrillas in neighboring Nan. As in other areas of the north, about nine-tenths of the insurgents are from ethnic minority groups, with Meo tribesmen predominating. Most of the insurgent leaders are Thai of Chinese extraction, but an increasing number of ethnic Thai cadre have begun to appear in the area over the past year or so. Although organized into battalions, the guerrilla groups usually operate as

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much smaller units. They are now well armed but usually avoid military contact with government forces. In April 1971, for example, Chiang Rai units withdrew into Laos in the face of a large Thai counterinsurgency operation. Failure of the Thai military to maintain a presence in the area permitted the insurgents gradually to drift back to their old base areas.

20. Except for the occasional government sweep, the Communists are free to operate in the mountains along the border to a depth of several miles into Thailand. The insurgents have tried to leap frog the north-south valleys and establish a toe hold in the mountain ridges to the west but apparently have had only limited success. Their efforts have been set back by the government-backed Chinese Irregular Forces. Lineal descendants of the old KMT irregulars, they have been relatively effective since they began to operate against the insurgents over a year ago.

21. In the area in a mountainous region straddling the borders of Phitsanulok, Phetchabun, and Loei provinces, the Communists have over 600 men--mostly Meo tribesmen--under arms. These forces are organized under the Area 23 command, the headquarters of which is in southern Sayaboury Province in Laos. Over the past year, the Communists have concentrated on strengthening their administrative and military control over hill tribe villages already under their influence. The Communists began to set up village committees in this area in 1969, and have sought to cut contacts between the hill tribesmen and nearby area under the control of the Thai Government.

22. At the same time that it is consolidating in the mountains, the insurgent organization is trying to build a greater capability to move more aggressively into the adjacent lowlands. [redacted]

[redacted] all Meo youth in areas under insurgent control have been put on notice that they are subject to being drafted into the insurgent ranks. The insurgents also appear to be attempting to increase their medical support and small-arms repair

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capabilities. Their first priority, however, is to turn the area into a secure base. Ambushes along the main highway that cuts through the mountains and attacks on isolated police posts have until recently forced the government into a defensive posture.

23. In part because the threat is closer to the sensitive central plains than any other insurgent area in the north, the government is moving with some vigor. Armed escort parties have been provided to construction crews building roads, and the army has started sending long-range reconnaissance patrols into the insurgent strongholds. In January the government kicked off a 12,000 man operation, Phu Kwang, designed to penetrate to the heart of insurgent's stronghold, a mountain massif astride the Phitsanulok-Phetchabun provincial border. It is the largest such operation of the insurgency, and the government has a good deal invested in it. Thus far the operation has been costly in terms of casualties, but the government won a psychological victory in "capturing" the guerrilla stronghold at Hin Long Kla. At a minimum, the operation took the initiative away from the insurgents, demonstrated that they do not yet have an inviolate sanctuary, and upset their plans for future expansion. The longer term impact will depend considerably on what the government chooses to do after the operation is over. Although Bangkok is unlikely to keep 12,000 men permanently tied down in this relatively small area, it is giving consideration to maintaining a residual presence in the mountains. Such a presence could have a significant impact on the insurgent organization, provided the Thai Army does not merely hole up in fortified defensive positions waiting for an inevitable insurgent counterattack.

24. A small but growing insurgent problem, arising out of tribal grievances, has developed far to the west along the Burma border in Tak Province. Because it is so far from the natural supply routes and bases in Laos, the insurgency in Tak may not develop as far or as fast as in the areas along the Laos border. Communist organizers were drawn to Tak to capitalize on a spontaneous outbreak of hostilities between aggrieved tribal peoples and government officials.

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In the few years that they have been active in Tak, the Communists have recruited and armed about 200 from among ethnic minority groups in two districts along the Burma border. Probably an equal number has been given rudimentary training, although they have not yet been outfitted with arms.

The deteriorating security situation in the province is reflected in the marked increase in road ambushes. The new highway from the provincial capital to the Burma border, built with Australian assistance, has become the scene of frequent attacks on government vehicles. Communist harassment has nearly halted construction on another road designed to link a now isolated border district to the rest of the province. Travel by US personnel along this route has been banned.

**North Thailand  
Communist-initiated Incidents**

|      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1966 | none  |
| 1967 | 50    |
| 1968 | 407   |
| 1969 | 947   |
| 1970 | 589*  |
| 1971 | 1,107 |

*\*Changeover to Bloc Weapons*

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**The Northeast**

25. The northeast is a relatively impoverished area that until recent years was isolated both physically and psychologically from Bangkok. The northeast has a long history of political dissidence, and much of Thailand's leftist heritage, such as it is, is rooted there. The northeast was the first area in which the Communists became active. The Communist Party of Thailand apparently decided on armed struggle in the northeast as early as 1952, and organizational work, although periodically disrupted by government repressive operations, proceeded during the 1950s. The Communists claim the first shot in the revolutionary armed struggle was fired in the northeast's Nakhon Phanom Province in August 1964.

26. Despite limited progress in developing a support base, the Communists decided in the mid-sixties to press ahead with aggressive tactics, and the number of Communist-initiated incidents continued to

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increase through 1966 and into 1967. But government forces were also becoming more aggressive. Villagers who had been supporting the rebels fled into the jungle, swelling insurgent ranks, but adding little to combat effectiveness and shrinking the rebels' support base. The rounding up in 1967 of some 30 Communist leaders in Bangkok disrupted the command structure, communications, and funding channels. Military sweeps later in 1967 kept the insurgents on the run, further disrupted their supply and support system, and by the end of the year had brought the insurgency almost to the point of collapse.

27. But with the insurgents on the defensive, the government eased up the pressure, and the Communists were able to shift to the more cautious and painstaking tactics of building a solid base of support in the rural villages. Although the Communists continue to mount ambushes and to attack isolated government positions, they are concentrating these days on the organizational work that must precede a return to more active armed struggle. The number of armed insurgents in the northeast is estimated to be between 1,525 and 1,775. (There were estimated to be as many as 1,900 armed insurgents in 1967.) The largest number is in Nakhon Phanom Province, where there are some 550 armed rebels, and Sakon Nakhon Province, where there are 300.

28. The insurgents have formed clandestine intelligence and support units called village military units, in at least 100 villages in Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, and Kalasin. If the average strength is from 10 to 20, these units would have some 1,000 to 2,000 persons. (These units are not armed and are excluded from figures on over-all insurgent strength.) Armed insurgent forces in the northeast do not operate in groups as large as those in the north. They have not yet gone to battalion-level organization, and most of the armed jungle bands include only 10 to 30 people.

29. Communist forces in the northeast, unlike those in the north, continue to be armed primarily with weapons of US origin. [redacted]

[redacted] the number of Communist bloc weapons

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is increasing, but so far they do not appear to have become standard. One major insurgent problem is that the main base area, the Phu Phan hills, does not border on Laos. The land between the Phu Phans and the border is flat, open, and heavily populated. This makes it difficult for the insurgents to operate a major clandestine supply system from Laos. As a result they apparently still rely on local sources of arms and ammunition, perhaps supplemented by the sporadic delivery of materiel from their own sources in Laos. Some smuggling across the largely unpatrolled Mekong River frontier is not impossible, and three infiltration routes figure prominently in reports of such supply movement from Laos: the valley running north-south in eastern Loei; That Phanom District in Nakhon Phanom Province; and a route through Nong Khai into Sakon Nakhon. Local procurement has never been a problem. Weapons are readily available on the Thai and Laotian black markets at reasonable prices. The Northeast insurgents also seize arms from village security units and, less frequently, capture them during armed engagements.

30. The Communist Party of Thailand's Northeast Regional Committee directs the northeast operation, but local committees appear to control day to day operations.

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31. Since 1964 the Communist headquarters for the northeast has been situated in the Phu Phan hills. These stretch intermittently from Laos south and east through Udon Province and western Sakon Nakhon and then east into Nakhon Phanom. Although covered in part by heavy vegetation, the hills are by no means impenetrable. The Communists have sought to extend their influence over the villages in the Phu Phan hills and thence into the outlying areas. They have been most active in Nakae District of Nakhon Phanom Province, which consistently

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has had the greatest number of violent incidents in the country. The government has admitted that armed insurgents have complete control over 28 of the district's 115 villages.

32. Over the past year Communist efforts have been focused on effecting tighter control over the villages close to the insurgent bases in the Phu Phan hills, primarily through setting up village military units. The establishment of these units represents a change in emphasis from the days of 1964-67 when villagers were usually brought directly into the ranks of the guerrilla bands. The emphasis now is to recruit villagers and use them, initially at least, in place, after the pattern used effectively in Indochina.

33. In addition to setting up village units the Communists have also begun to organize political committees in the villages. The committees are replacing or supplementing a covert cell structure that served as the initial penetrator of the villages. Since the committees are more sophisticated and less clandestine political instruments than the cells, their formation indicates that the Communist apparatus in the northeast is making significant progress at the village level.

34. There has already been some manifestation of the success of this program. The Communists have demonstrated a growing ability to manipulate public opinion and stir up the villagers against the government. In Nakae District, for example, the construction of a small dam was thwarted by well-orchestrated political agitation, including demonstrations at the district seat, assassinations, and propaganda. The dam project was in fact a laudable one. There would have been minimal uprooting of villagers, monetary compensation was adequate, and much land would have been improved. But in the absence of full-time government cadre on the scene, the government's side of the story was never presented effectively. A similar weakening of the government's writ was effected in a nearby area in Kalasin Province where the insurgents instigated the villagers to demand that the government pull out its security forces.

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35. The Thai military claims that attacks on terrorist camps and supply stores in the Phu Phan hills, plus the cutting of some supply channels from the villagers to the terrorists, have caused morale and food problems for the rebels. Increased government patrolling may have hindered the party's mass work, but it does not seem to have seriously affected the party units themselves. The vigorous but short-term suppression campaigns that have characterized government counter-insurgency in the Northeast have had only a temporary effect. Persistent military patrolling has led to a marked decline in insurgent-initiated incidents in Sakon Nakhon Province, but the Thai have not brought themselves to apply this lesson to the insurgent core area in the Nakae District of Nakhon Phanom. Insurgent organizational work, aimed at the eventual resumption of a "liberation struggle," goes on there largely unimpeded except during the government's sporadic suppressive operations.

#### The Mid-South

36. Insurgency in the Thai isthmus--or "mid-south" region--is also growing, but it is still far less significant than in the north and the northeast. Because the area is far removed from natural supply corridors and because the Communists have devoted neither the time nor the energy they have expended in other areas, their prospects for success are not as considerable. In fact, promising cadre have been drawn from the mid-South to the more active arenas in the north and northeast. Nevertheless, the jungle and mountain terrain of the region is well suited to insurgent activity, and its people are somewhat disaffected by Bangkok's neglect. If the government fails to nip the movement while it is still nascent, more serious problems may develop on the narrow isthmus in coming years.

37. There are about 450 insurgents in the mid-south. These rebels are active in two operational areas--in a jungle astride the border between Nakhon Si Thammarat and Surat Thani and in a hilly area covering part of Trang and Phattalung provinces. (Another small but inactive group of about 80 Thai

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guerrillas has grown up in recent years in the far south, in southern Songkhla and Satun provinces, adjacent to areas of Malaysian Communist control.) Food and financial support is obtained locally. Weapons are largely of US origin, some of World War II vintage.

38. Terrorist activities in the mid-south are aimed at isolated police posts and transportation lines. Highway harassment has increased in recent months to the point that two major routes--the main peninsular route between Trang and Phattalung and the road between the railhead at Thung Song and Nakhon Si Thammarat city--have been declared insecure. Ambushes of Thai official vehicles on the winding and hilly Trang-Phattalung road have been going on for some time. The most serious incident in the mid-south to date was an ambush of a police convoy just off the Thung Song - Nakhon Si Thammarat road in January, which resulted in 15 police deaths. Government pressure on the insurgents has increased, but its efforts are sporadic and Bangkok continues to give the area a low priority compared to the north and northeast.

#### Malaysians in The Far South

39. The Malaysian National Liberation Army, the armed jungle-based branch of the Communist Party of Malaysia--commonly called the Communist Terrorist Organization--has used the southern border provinces of Thailand as a refuge and support base since the early days of the Malayan emergency in the 1950's. The organization operates against Malaysia rather than Thailand, and its members are not counted as part of the Thai insurgent force.

40. Throughout its existence it has been composed primarily of Chinese. It numbers 1,800-1,900 and is still using the old three-regiment formation of the 1950s. Only one regiment has a Malay majority, and it is under Chinese leadership. During the past four years there has been an effort to leaven the organization with Malay stock, primarily by recruiting among Thai Muslims.

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41. Perhaps as many as 100,000 civilians live in Thai areas under the influence or control of the terrorist organization. The Betong salient, with a population of about 40,000, is almost completely under Communist control. Both peasants and businessmen find it politic to contribute to the organization's coffers.

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42. The terrorists are armed with an odd lot of weapons--some of World War II origin, others captured from Malaysian security forces and still others purchased on the black market. No crew-served weapons have been reported. Explosives are readily available on the Thai side of the border, and the terrorists are known to possess radio transmitters.

43. The terrorist organization maintains limited contact with the Thai Communists. A 1949 agreement on zones of influence drew the line somewhat south of the seventh parallel along roughly ethnic lines, separating the Thai Muslims from Thai Buddhists. Some Thai insurgents have been trained in Malaysian terrorist camps near the border

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The recent southward movement of some small Thai Communist groups into southern Songkhla Province into the periphery of terrorist-controlled areas suggests that cooperation may grow.

44. Despite treaty arrangements between the authorities in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur for cooperative measures against the terrorist organization the Thai are dragging their feet on any meaningful joint effort. The Thai permit Malaysian forces to cross the border in hot pursuit. But they refuse to permit the stationing of Malaysian troops on Thai soil, leaving the Malaysians resentful of what they consider the indifference and lack of motivation of their counterparts.

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45. The Thai attitude stems partly from their belief that Kuala Lumpur has irredentist designs on the Malay-populated border provinces of southern Thailand and that the Malaysians are abetting separatist sentiment among local ethnic Malay Muslims. As long as Bangkok is faced with Thai insurgency elsewhere in the country and until it perceives some threat to Thailand in the terrorists' activities, it is unlikely to join Malaysia in coming to grips fully with the problem.

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